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Liem Thian Joe's Unpublished History of Kian Gwan

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Studies on the role of the overseas Chinese in the economies of Southeast Asia are rare enough, despite their generally acknowledged importance. This has been particularly true of Indonesia, and consequently it is a matter of some interest to discover an unpublished history of Kian Gwan (Oei Tiong Ham Concern), the biggest and longest-lasting Chinese business of all in Indonesia. Further interest is aroused by the fact that the manuscript was written by the late Liem Thian Joe, the well-known Semarang journalist and historian. This combination gives us promise of insights into the firm itself, the Oei family which established it and built it up, and the history of the Chinese of Semarang where its original office was founded.

I The Author¹⁾

Liem Thian Joe was born in Parakan, in Central Java, in 1895 or 1897. His earliest education was at Malay and Javanese schools, but he soon moved to a Hokkien Chinese school which he attended for ten years. After this he attended the Tiong Hoa Hak Tong (the Chinese-language school established by the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan) at Ngadiredjo.

After leaving school, he did not at once pur-

sue the talent for writing which was already evident in his schoolwork. A short experience as a trader in Ngadiredjo soon convinced him, however, that he should seek his livelihood as a writer.

His career in journalism seems to have begun in the 1920's when he joined the staff of the Semarang *peranakan* Chinese daily, *Warna Warta* (although there is some suggestion that he also contributed to the Jakarta daily, *Perniagaan*, at this time). In the early 1930's, he moved from *Warna Warta* to edit the Semarang daily, *Djawa Tengah* (and its sister monthly *Djawa Tengah Review*). In later years he was also a regular contributor to the weekly edition of the Jakarta newspaper, *Sin Po*.²⁾

His best-known publication, *Riwajat Semarang (Dari Djamannja Sam Poo Sampe Terhapesnja Kongkoan)*, was published by Ho Kim Yoe of Semarang in 1933. Based on a series of articles which he had written for the *Djawa Tengah Review* from March 1931 to July 1933, this book of some 300 pages is not so much a history of Semarang (as its main title would suggest) as of its Chinese inhabitants, from their first arrival in about 1416 to the abolition of the Council of Chinese Officers (Kongkoan) in 1931. For all its Chinese-centrism, the book remains an invaluable source for our understanding of the history of Central Java and Semarang in particular. Liem was fortunate in being able to use records in

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1) Biographical data relating to Liem Thian Joe are taken from Tan Hong Boen [1935: 138], Suryadinata [1972], and private communication from Liem Ek Hian.

2) On the *peranakan* Chinese press of this period, see Suryadinata [1971].

Chinese which had been stored over a very long period in the office of the Kongkoan, but which had fallen into very bad condition through lack of proper care and the ravages of time and were soon, with the abolition of the Kongkoan, to vanish completely. (Just where they disappeared to is a mystery which conceivably may be related to the equally mysterious three wagonloads of Chinese documents which, Professor Slamet Muljana tells us, were seized in a police raid in 1928 by the Dutch Resident Poortman from the Chinese shrine of Sam Po Kong on the outskirts of Semarang [Muljana 1968: 12; Parлиндungan 1964]. If Poortman did indeed gain possession of a large quantity of old Chinese documents in Semarang at about that time which were to form the source for a resume in Dutch which later appeared in Indonesian translation in Parлиндungan's Tuanku Rao and were thence taken up by Slamet Muljana, it would seem more likely that they were acquired a few years later from the office of the Kongkoan when that body was dissolved. We know, from Liem Thian Joe, that a large quantity of old Chinese books was held there and that it disappeared at that time [Liem 1933: Preface]. On the other hand, there seems no good reason to believe that ancient books had been kept at the Sam Po shrine, which lacked the facilities for storing such a large quantity of perishable material.)

Liem was also responsible for writing several other published books. In 1937 his book commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Semarang Chinese Chamber of Commerce (*Boekoe Peringatan, 1907-1937, Tiong Hwa Siang Hwee, Semarang*) was published anonymously.

Another book, *Pusaka Tionghoa*, was published in Semarang in about 1952.

Liem's interests, demonstrated in his publications, were parochial in the sense that his attention was firmly rivetted on the history of his own group, the Indonesian Chinese, and in particular those who lived in his own region of north-central Java. His regionalism may readily be understood since he never had the opportunity to travel far from his native province of Central Java. His Chinese-centrism was typical of Indonesian Chinese intellectuals of his age. His formative years were those of the flowering of overseas Chinese nationalism in the Indies and the Chinese-language schooling which he received was itself a product of the heightened consciousness of Chineseness amongst the peranakan Chinese population which underlay the nationalist movement.³⁾

His writing, particularly in *Riwajat Semarang* (but to a much lesser extent in the present unpublished manuscript), is typical of the peranakan Chinese dialect of Malay (or bahasa Melaju Tionghoa), which has by now all but died out in speech and no longer appears in print.⁴⁾ His style is anecdotal and personal rather than analytical and, although there are occasional references to sources such as books or newspaper articles, these are never encumbered by such details as date and place of publication or even the number of the page to which reference is made.

His absorption in the history of the Chinese

3) On the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism in Indonesia, see Williams [1960].

4) For a discussion of this dialect, see Nio Joe Lan [1962: Chapter 2], and Tio Le Soei [1959: Chapter 13]. On the language of daily use among the Indonesian Chinese in 1920, see Coppel [1973].

of Semarang was fully appreciated by the author of the major sociological study of that community, Donald Willmott, who dedicated his book, *The Chinese of Semarang*, "To Liem Thian Joe, the Semarang historian, journalist and friend who has given this study its foundations in the past" [Willmott 1960]. Liem died in Semarang in 1963.

II The Origin of the Manuscript

The manuscript, which has no title or heading, is typewritten on foolscap paper, running to some 31 pages (including two pages of notes). It bears a number of signs of being a draft, rather than a final version, but the only obviously incomplete section is the absence of the Chinese text of a poem written by Oei Tjie Sien, the founder of the firm, of which an Indonesian translation by Liem is incorporated in the text. The manuscript is dated Semarang, 1959. Occasionally words, phrases or even whole sentences are inserted in the author's handwriting, as are also occasional words in Chinese characters.

The manuscript was acquired by the Monash University Library in early 1972 from Liem Ek Hian, a son of the author who still lives in Semarang. According to Liem Ek Hian, his father was commissioned by the company to write the history in anticipation of the centenary of the firm (which was to occur in 1963) and spent three years finding the data for it in the company archives and the correspondence of the Oei family. The Monash University Library also acquired from Liem Ek Hian at the same time a copy of the Oei family genealogy, eleven short Chinese-language writings, four short unpublished

essays by his father, and a collection of documents dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which are of particular interest to a student of the history of the Chinese in Java. The latter include examples of the travel passes which were required under the *passenstelsel*, burial permits, etc.

It is not clear why the manuscript was never published. Liem Thian Joe did receive a honorarium from the company of Rp. 10,000 in March 1960 and an intimation from Tan Tek Peng, the then manager of the firm, that the Oei family might pay him an additional premium if they were happy with the history. But to the day of his death, Liem heard nothing further from the Oei family. It may be that the troubles which led to the nationalization of the Indonesian sector of the giant enterprise in 1961 made it seem inappropriate to publish an Indonesian-language centenary history, since by the time the firm's centenary arrived the company was already nationalized. On the other hand, no such considerations prevented the publication of a Dutch-language history of the firm by one of its directors, Tjoa Soe Tjong, in the centenary year [Tjoa Soe Tjong 1963].

III The Manuscript as Economic History

It must be admitted that the economic historian who looks to this unpublished history for an explanation of the success of Kian Gwan and the entrepreneurial talents of those members of the Oei family who guided its fortunes will be disappointed. The late Liem Thian Joe was more chronicler than

historian. The date when each new company or branch in the group was established within Indonesia or abroad is carefully noted in the narrative. So, too, are changes in location of the head office or main warehouse or in the senior management. The appointment of outsiders (i.e., those who were not members of the Oei family) and, in particular, those with specialist technical skills to high office in the group, is noted but its significance is passed over. Similarly, we are able to follow the growth and expansion of the enterprise in the narrative but only rarely are we given any hint of the economic context in which this expansion took place. The entrepreneurial skill of the principal businessmen in the family (Oei Tjie Sien, Oei Tiong Ham, and Oei Tjong Hauw) is not analyzed in any depth and we get no clear picture of the degree to which, if at all, decision-making was delegated to senior managerial staff. All of these matters are more satisfactorily dealt with in the paper by Panglaykim and Palmer [1970].⁵⁾

Two aspects of Liem's treatment of the company history, however, perhaps deserve mention here. Firstly, he describes one episode in the history of the company which is passed over by Panglaykim and Palmer and which may have some interest. In 1917 there

was a sharp fall in sugar prices, as a result of which many speculators went bankrupt. As the prices fell and fell, Kian Gwan adopted a "wait and see" policy. According to Liem it did not, however, follow the traditional Chinese commercial proverb: *Djiok khi, boo djiok look* (buy in when prices rise, but not when they fall). Once the prices had reached a very low level, Kian Gwan suddenly cornered a very large amount of the sugar from the brokers. Then, after a few months, as prices gradually rose again, it was able to release its sugar onto the market profitably, unlike the other Chinese companies during the sugar crisis. This is not to say that Kian Gwan had everything going its way at that time. In September 1917 the Netherlands Indies government imposed a war profits tax of 30 per cent on profits made between 1914 and 1917, a retroactive measure which created difficulties for many companies which had already dissipated their profits. Furthermore, during the period from 1917 to 1919 rice prices rose steeply and, after an unsuccessful attempt by the Resident of Semarang to induce rice merchants like Kian Gwan to hold down prices voluntarily, he seized all the stocks in their warehouses and sold them direct to the public with the assistance of the municipal authorities after allowing the merchants a small profit of only 25 cents to the picul [Liem MS: xvii-xviii].⁶⁾

The other interesting feature of Liem's history of the company is his explanation of the longevity of the firm in terms of "Chinese

5) An earlier and less comprehensive version of their paper appeared under the title, "Study of Entrepreneurialship [sic] in Developing Countries: The Development of One Chinese Concern in Indonesia" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, March 1970, pp.85-95. For an earlier economic history of the firm, to which their paper is greatly indebted for factual material, see Tjoa Soe Tjong [1963]. On Chinese business methods and entrepreneurship more generally in Indonesia, see Vleming [1925] and Williams [1952: 34-60]. The standard economic history of the Indonesian Chinese is Cator [1936].

6) A characteristic of Liem's writing (which reflects his Hokkien school education in Java) is his use of Hokkien versions of Chinese-language quotations rendered in a Dutch form of romanization.

philosophy." He rightly pointed to its unique success amongst Chinese businesses in Indonesia in managing to survive for almost a century and over four generations of the family. According to Chinese philosophy, he said, the longevity of anything was due to the virtue (*kebedjikan*) of those who play an important part in it. The Chinese proverb went: *Tjek sian tji keh, pit yu i khing* (A household which accumulates virtue will surely gain its reward in plenty). This, he said, was the case with Oei Tjie Sien, Oei Tiong Ham, and Oei Tjong Hauw in the history of Kian Gwan. This virtue did not just consist in generosity of charitable donations, since according to Chinese philosophy a virtuous deed must be done without any desire for reward or praise, or, as the Chinese proverb put it, *sian yok djin ti, put si tjin sian*. It was only such deeds, known as *im tek*, which were acceptable to the Almighty. Liem concluded his history of Kian Gwan on this traditional note, with the traditional prayer that the enterprise might endure for thousands of years (*tay giap djian djiu*) [Liem MS: xxix].

IV The Manuscript as Biography of the Oei Family

It will probably have emerged from what has already been said that the manuscript is quite uncritical of the leading figures of the Oei family who were responsible for the development of Kian Gwan and the Oei Tiong Ham Concern group as a whole. Consequently, one should not expect to find a fully rounded biography of these unusually successful Indonesian Chinese entrepreneurs. On the other hand, we can find biographical data

about them which cannot be found in the other studies of the business or the family which are known to me. These studies are the paper by Panglaykim and Palmer, the article by Tjoa Soe Tjong, and the little-known but fascinating autobiography by Oei Tiong Ham's second daughter, Koo Hui Lan (Madame Wellington Koo) [Koo 1943]. It may be useful to set out here thumbnail sketches of the three leading figures in the family as they appear in the manuscript, and at the same time fleshing out the picture with details from other sources where these conflict with or add to Liem's account.

The founder of Kian Gwan, Oei Tjie Sien, alias Soe Khiem, was born on June 23, 1835 in the village of Li-lim-sia, in the Tong-an district of the residency of Tjoan-tjioe in the province of Fukien. He was the sixth son of Oei Tjhing In and, of a peasant family [Liem MS: i].⁷⁾ (According to Koo Hui Lan, his father was a petty government official [Koo 1943: 4].) At all events, he received a good education in his youth, for various accounts confirm that in later life he spent much of his leisure reading books from his considerable library and writing poetry [Liem MS: i, viii-x; Koo 1943: 15]. He left China for Semarang in 1858, together with a number of friends who shared his views, for political reasons. From Liem's account it appears that Tjie Sien was an opponent of the Manchu government who had formed a trade office which carried on a kind of rice-growing cooperative with like-minded people. His departure for Java was, in fact, flight from the increasingly repressive rule of the Manchus. (This version confirms the

7) For photographs of Oei Tjie Sien and his wife, see *Sampoo Fonds Blad* [1938: opposite 6].

rather romantic description given by Koo Hui Lan of his flight as a rebel refugee after the failure of the T'aiping rebellion [Liem MS: i; Koo 1943: 3-5].) According to Liem, Tjie Sien maintained his political views until his death, which apparently occurred in Semarang on March 8, 1900. He relates that in 1897 the Manchu government made him an award (*tiong-gie tay-hoe*) but that he never discussed the award with his family and would not display it. He remained convinced that China was the land for the Chinese to return eventually and he refused, contrary to the custom amongst the Chinese of the time, to have his gravestone (*bong-pay*) engraved with the year of the Ch'ing dynasty. It is interesting that Koo Hui Lan, who gives a lengthy description of Oei Tjie Sien in his declining years, makes no mention of this Manchu honor. (On the other hand, she does mention that by the time his son Oei Tiong Ham was seven years old, Tjie Sien had saved enough to buy his pardon from the Manchu government so that he could revisit China in safety) [Liem MS: viii; Koo 1943: 8].

According to Liem, Tjie Sien married the fourth daughter of a Semarang trader. This prosaic account contrasts with and is more likely to be true than the family legend recounted by Koo Hui Lan, who tells us that her grandfather was lodging in a Chinese camp as a petty trader when the camp owner, an elderly rebel who had left China for Semarang several years earlier, happened to pass him by one evening while he lay asleep. The proprietor was "startled to see a faint aura of light hovering about Tjie Sien's head." When this phenomenon recurred each night, he was so impressed that he proposed that Tjie Sien

should become his son-in-law, a proposal which Tjie Sien accepted with alacrity [Koo 1943: 6-7].

Oei Tjie Sien was responsible for purchasing the family estate at Semongan, outside Semarang, and in 1880 was given official permission to reside there, although it lay outside the Chinese quarter. According to Liem, he chose the property, which was owned by a Jew named Johannes, because at Gedung-batu, on part of the land, was situated the shrine of Sam Po Kong, which was much venerated by the Chinese. Oei Tjie Sien was upset by the venality of his predecessor in title, who had levied a toll on the Chinese pilgrims who came to pray there on the first and fifteenth day of each Chinese month. By acquiring the property, he was able to abolish this tax on religious devotion [Liem MS: iii-iv].⁸⁾ It was on this estate, too, that he made

8) The story of the acquisition of the land by Oei Tjie Sien also appears in *Sampoo Fonds Blad* [1938: 3-4], which includes a photograph of the Chinese-language stone "Testament" (*tjio-pay*) which he caused to be erected on the property together with an Indonesian-language translation of its text. The *Sampoo Fonds Blad* contains several other items which are of interest and relate to the Oei family. Apart from photographs of Oei Tiong Ham and Oei Tjong Hauw, there are several poems in traditional *syair* form, written by one T.S.Tj. (Tan Siau Tjwan ?—cf. [Sampoo Fonds Blad 1938: 98]) in homage to the family. One of these, entitled "*Maksoed Jang Soetji Dapet Koernianja Allah*," can be read as an acrostic from the initial letter of each line as "*Thay Tia Oei Tjie Sien Toean Tanah Simongan Semarang TSTJ*" [Sampoo Fonds Blad 1938: opposite 7]. Another, untitled, is in praise of the Oei family house and cemetery on the property, and is accompanied by eight photographs depicting them [Sampoo Fonds Blad 1938: opposite 10, 11, 14, 15 and 18]. The *Sampoo Fonds Blad* was published to raise funds for the upkeep and improvement of the Sam Po shrine and to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the acquisition of the site by Oei Tjie Sien.

his choice of site for the family cemetery, using the traditional Chinese science of *hongsoei* [Liem MS: vii]. Liem does not, however, bring out Tjie Sien's almost obsessive preoccupation with the cemetery and his own tomb in his later years [Koo 1943: 18–20]. Tjie Sien spent much of the latter part of his life on the estate, after leaving the management of the business in the hands of his son, Tiong Ham. According to Liem, he talked a great deal with his friends, was fond of reading, and wrote verses. One of his favorite books was *Tjoan-tjioe Hoe-tjie*, a four-volume history of the city of Tjoan-tjioe which he had annotated profusely. Liem intended to incorporate in his history of Kian Gwan the Chinese text of one of Tjie Sien's poems, and Liem's own translation into Indonesian in *syair* form appears there. The poem, in eight stanzas, traces his life from his birth in Tong-an district, through his emigration to Semarang to his success in business there. Liem comments that he was unable to render adequately in his translation the tone of humility (*seed-ji*) in the Chinese original [Liem MS: viii–x]. Apart from his poetry, Tjie Sien also constructed short balancing phrases (*twi-thee*). Liem cites one example of these in the original characters which incorporates the name of the firm (Kian Gwan) [Liem MS: vi]. One gentlemanly pursuit of his later years which is not mentioned in Liem's account was lotus cultivation [Koo 1943: 20].

If we combine the accounts in the manuscript and in the Koo Hui Lan memoirs, we can picture fairly clearly the person of this founder of Kian Gwan. We can imagine an elderly man, aloof, stiff, and rather formal. His sons always had to stand in his presence.

He rarely ate with the family, but when he did it was a formal occasion. At such meals he invariably gave the younger generation a little lecture on the virtue of thrift, but every morning he himself would present a coin to each of his grandchildren. He was very conservative and traditional in his ways. He never wore anything but traditional Chinese dress, he kept his queue, he was very religious and strictly celebrated Chinese holidays.⁹⁾ His one extravagance, according to his granddaughter, was his stables. Liem also depicts him going about Semarang in his carriage drawn by a pair of large Australian horses, wearing silk jacket and trousers in contrasting colors of black (*oh-tioe*) and white (*peh-tioe*) with a conical hat (*kopiah karpus*) to complete the ensemble. After Tjie Sien's death, his body was interred in the cemetery at Penggil-ing on the Semongan estate but his *hio-hwee* were sent to Amoy in China [Liem MS: xi, xii; Koo 1943: Chapter 2].

Oei Tiong Ham, alias Oen Tiong, the son of Oei Tjie Sien, was born on November 19, 1866. At the age of eight he began to attend an old-style Chinese school (*soe-sioek*) and later also took lessons in Malay language and the Roman alphabet [Liem MS: 2]. When he was of age (*dewasa*), his father began to train him in commerce and gradually withdrew himself from the family business [Liem MS: iv]. Liem gives no hint of the story recounted by

9) Quite apart from any personal preference on Tjie Sien's part, wearing attire other than Chinese dress would have been illegal in those days unless government permission was obtained to do otherwise; see The Siauw Giap [1966: 187, fn. 6]. For a detailed description of Chinese holidays in Central Java in the late nineteenth century, see Tjoa Tjoe Koan [1887].

Koo Hui Lan of her father as a profligate gambler in his youth [Koo 1943: 8-11], nor of any friction between Oei Tiong Ham and his father over business methods [Koo 1943: 12]. In this connection, Koo Hui Lan has some interesting observations to make of her father's "business genius," which she much admired:

He was always alert for new ventures in which to invest his money and he had a remarkable flair for choosing brilliant up-and-coming associates. He believed in 'hunches' and played them for all they were worth. He stressed luck and often told me that if he were given the choice between a dozen intelligent men and one lucky man he would take the lucky one every time [Koo 1943: 57-58].¹⁰⁾

In many ways Oei Tiong Ham was the antithesis of his father—a modernizer and a person who was open to Western influences. After his father's death, he was one of the first Chinese to obtain the consent of the Indies government to his cutting off his queue (*tauwt-jang*) and wearing Western dress (which he did in 1902). His example was soon followed by many of the Kian Gwan employees [Liem MS: xii]. Oei Tiong Ham was also one of the first Chinese to obtain permission to live in Gergadji (in the European quarter of Semarang) rather than in the Chinese quarter, to which the Chinese were still legally confined under *wijkenstelsel* [Liem MS: 12-13]. Koo Hui Lan tells us that he preferred to use the

best Dutch doctors rather than traditional Chinese physicians or Javanese *doekoens* [Koo 1943: 65].¹¹⁾

Despite this, there were limits to his receptiveness to Westernization. He did not speak the Dutch language and his command of English was modest, so he conversed with Dutch officials through an interpreter since it would have been beneath the dignity of either to use Malay (a language which both sides understood perfectly) [Koo 1943: 33]. By the same token, he showed no interest in applying to the Indies government for assimilation to European legal status (*gelijkstelling*) or in reversing his name, European-style, to become T.H. Oei, a practice which was then fashionable among some Western-oriented Chinese [Liem MS: xiii-xiv]. His preference for Western clothes and the European quarter of Semarang did not imply a rejection of things Chinese. He was generous in his financial contributions to the Chinese-language THHK schools throughout Central Java and to the renovation of the Thay Kak Sie temple in Semarang [Liem MS: xiii-xiv]. While Koo Hui Lan was young, her father took the family each year on trips to China and Singapore [Koo 1943: 23].

Oei Tiong Ham was obviously an immensely wealthy man and he lived extravagantly. In Liem Thian Joe's account, his wealth was evident from the range of his benefactions,

10) Panglaykim and Palmer also refer to his appointment of Tan Tek Peng, "a daring gambler," as chief manager of Kian Gwan [Panglaykim and Palmer 1970: 16-17].

11) On the other hand, Panglaykim and Palmer say that he retained his luck (*Hok-kie*) by implementing the *hong-swie* idea of harmony between wind and water, that he consulted his special spiritual adviser and followed his advice on whether or not to buy a new car or a new house, but that he did not go to the temple to make an offering after some speculative venture as others did [Panglaykim and Palmer 1970: 18].

which Liem lists, and the reference to a dispute over the distribution of his income tax in 1915 when he changed his domicile to Salatiga. His income was said to amount to some two million guilders at that time [Liem MS: xvi]. He may well have been the wealthiest man in the colony. Part of his immense fortune was made as the last and probably the greatest of the opium *pachters*, holding as he did the opium monopolies on franchise from the colonial government until the system was abolished in 1904 in Surabaya, Solo, Yogyakarta, and Semarang. His profits from the sale of opium in the period 1890-1903 amounted to 18 million guilders [Liem MS: vii-viii; 1933: 180-181].

The extravagance of Oei Tiong Ham's lifestyle does not emerge in Liem's account, but it is graphically described by Koo Hui Lan. We learn from her that his Dutch colonial-style house in Semarang was set in a large ornamental garden which included a private zoo stocked with bears, deer, snakes, gibbons, cassowaries, and peacocks. The garden and the zoo were thrown open to the public once a week for a small entrance fee, which was then turned over to her mother's charities [Koo 1943: 30-31]. As she put it:

Father appreciated good living and enjoyed entertaining in the grand manner, so our house was run on a scale unusual even in Java, where wages were low and servants easily trained. The household was in the charge of a Malay majordomo, who kept forty servants in order. Directly under him was a Malay butler and twelve serving boys. They waited expertly on the table with the greatest elegance and style. . . .

Catering for my father was a difficult task, as he was an enormous eater. One night he would order Chinese food, the next a series of complicated French dishes. To satisfy his whims there were three kitchens running simultaneously. Chinese food was prepared in one, in another European, while the third was used almost entirely for the preparation of special delicacies which my father dispatched in endless streams as presents to the Dutch officials. There were four Chinese head cooks and a Malay chef who had charge of the French cuisine. He was a magnificent artist who had made his reputation at the best Dutch restaurant in Batavia and had also formerly served as head chef to the Governor-General of the island. The three kitchens functioned as separate units; each cook had his own staff, did his own marketing and was responsible only to the majordomo, who checked his accounts once a week.

The house and grounds were guarded by four Negro watchmen who were newly arrived from Africa and spoke little Malay. Koo Hui Lan comments: "My father picked the biggest and blackest he could find, because they terrified the natives, who nicknamed them 'Black Dutchmen'" [Koo 1943: 31-32].

Oei Tiong Ham regularly spent two hours over his elaborate toilette ritual in the mornings. And for his breakfast "he started off with a few mangoes or papayas, followed by a bowl of steaming porridge and climaxed with six fried eggs and several slices of liver garnished with lavish curls of bacon, all washed down with bowls of tea. To compose his nerves after this exertion Father smoked two

fat black cigars” [Koo 1943: 33-35]. The gargantuan scale of this extraordinary man was also reflected in his eight wives and 26 children (13 sons and 13 daughters). Although he was cold and businesslike in determining which of the children should succeed him in the business, he appears to have been generous in his treatment of the others from his vast wealth [Panglaykim and Palmer 1970: 18].

The colonial government recognized Oei Tiong Ham as an important man to cultivate. In 1898 he was appointed Captain of the Chinese in Semarang but he only held the position for about two years when he asked to be relieved of the post because of pressure of business. In recognition of his services he was, in 1901, appointed titular Major [Liem MS: viii]. For his part, Oei Tiong Ham recognized that it was good business to cultivate Dutch officialdom. As Koo Hui Lan says, “Papa’s method was simple: from the lowest to the highest, he kept them well fed. It was clever psychology, since the officials were badly paid and could not afford all the table luxuries which their robust Dutch appetites craved” [Koo 1943: 52]. Oei Tiong Ham died in Singapore on June 2, 1924, and he was buried in Semarang with a remarkably simple ceremony for a wealthy Chinese of his station, at his own specific request [Liem MS: xix; 1933: 264-266].

After the death of Oei Tiong Ham, the business was carried on by two of his sons, Oei Tjong Swan and Oei Tjong Hauw. The former sold out his share in 1931, leaving Oei Tjong Hauw as the dominant figure in the company for the next two decades. His role in the further development of the firm is

carefully analyzed by Panglaykim and Palmer [1970: 19-29], but their account is almost silent about the three-and-one-half years of the Japanese occupation. The omission is the more striking because, unlike many other prominent Chinese, he was not interned by the Japanese.¹²⁾ On the contrary, they appointed him as one of the few Chinese members of the Central Advisory Council (*Chuoh Sangi In*) created in August 1943, and similarly of the Committee for the Investigation of Indonesian Independence (*Badan Penyelidik Kemerdekaan Indonesia*) established in 1945 [Somers 1965: 109, fn. 11; Anderson 1961: 10-11, 18]. He was thus an important political figure at this time.

Liem’s history of Kian Gwan has relatively little to say about Oei Tjong Hauw, but it does make some reference to his role during the Japanese occupation. It appears that he was also appointed as head of the Semarang *Kakyoh Shohkai* (*Hoakiao Tjonghwee*), the only Chinese organization permitted in Semarang. In this capacity he was allowed the use of one of the few motor cars available in the city, and the only Chinese to have one. Liem is careful to draw attention to less well-known actions of Oei Tjong Hauw during this period. He is said to have requested the release of some Semarang Chinese who had been interned by the Japanese in Surabaya and stood surety for their good behavior after their release. He also is said to have forwarded medicines to Chinese internees at Tjimahi via the *Kakyoh Shohkai* in Bandung, and to have helped the families of some Chinese internees who were in difficulties [Liem MS:

12) The experience of one such internee is described by Nio Joe Lan [1946].

26]. Liem's defensiveness on these matters suggests that there may have been some criticism of Oei Tjong Hauw's collaboration with the Japanese, but the issue is not openly raised either in his account or in that of Panglaykim and Palmer. Oei Tjong Hauw died suddenly and prematurely on January 21, 1950 at the age of 49 years [Liem MS: xxix].

In summary, it can be said that Liem Thian Joe's unpublished history of Kian Gwan, although by no means a major contribution like his *Riwayat Semarang*, has added to our knowledge of this remarkable family of Indonesian Chinese entrepreneurs and, in particular, of its three leading figures.

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